



Fact Sheet for Schools: Caulk containing PCBs may be present in older schools and buildings

Between 1950 and 1978, caulk containing potentially harmful PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) was used in many buildings, including schools. Although PCBs were banned in the United States in 1978, contaminated caulk still exists in older establishments that have not had the caulk replaced. PCB bioaccumulation in children can damage immune, reproductive, nervous, and endocrine systems.

Children can be exposed to PCBs by:

- Breathing in dust contaminated with PCBs
- Touching caulk and contaminated soil directly
- Putting their hands into their mouths after touching the caulk, soil, and surrounding building materials.

PCBs were not added to caulk after 1978. Therefore, in general, schools built after 1978 do not contain PCBs in caulk.

What are PCBs?

PCBs are organic chemicals that were used in construction materials and electrical products produced before 1978. Caulk containing these chemicals may still be present in older schools and buildings, sometimes at high levels. With increased awareness and cleanup efforts, PCB levels in the United States have decreased substantially.

How are people exposed to PCBs?

People whose workplaces and jobs involve working with PCB-laden objects or in PCB cleanup are at the highest risk for elevated exposure. Most people have some accumulation of PCBs in their bodies. Fish, meat, and dairy contain small amounts of PCBs. In fact, most people's exposure to PCBs is via the food chain. When products containing PCBs are disposed of improperly, PCBs can enter waterways and contaminate fish and other animals. Indoor air has been found to contain PCBs from some types of caulk in building materials. People can also be exposed to PCBs when handling PCB-containing products such as caulk.

Does the caulk in my home or other places contain PCBs?

PCBs in caulk have not been found in single-family homes. EPA has only found the chemical in caulk in large, older apartment complexes and some older buildings, such as schools.

What can I do about PCBs in schools?

If caulk containing PCBs is discovered, you should avoid direct contact with caulk and nearby porous materials, if possible. If caulk-containing PCBs are discovered, be sure to limit exposure to the caulk until it has been safely removed. Here are some ways for decreasing exposure:

- Keep children from touching caulk or surfaces near caulk.
- Clean frequently to reduce dust.
- Use wet cloths to clean surfaces.
- Use vacuums with HEPA filters.
- Wash children's hands with soap and water before eating.
- Wash children's toys often.
- Wash surfaces, window sills, walls, and objects often in rooms known to have PCB-containing caulk.
- Consider testing the air for PCBs or test the caulk if it is peeling or visibly deteriorating.
- Follow safe work practices when renovating.
- Improve ventilation by opening windows or adding exhaust fans.

What NOT to Do:

- Do not attempt to remove PCB-containing caulk by yourself. PCBs should be removed by personnel wearing protective equipment who follow procedures to minimize the spread of PCBs.
- Do not sweep with dry brooms or use dusters because they spread dust.

Are children in direct danger if their school has caulk containing PCBs?

PCBs accumulate in the body in high levels only after prolonged exposure to the chemical. Follow the recommended procedures to reduce exposure. Restricting children from areas where PCB-containing caulk is located, promoting safe work practices during renovation activities in schools, and removing caulk safely as part of a PCB removal or renovation project reduces the potential for exposure.

EPA is helping to address the issue of PCBs in caulk

EPA is conducting research on how the public is exposed to PCBs in caulk and on the best approaches for reducing exposure and potential risks associated with PCBs in caulk. Where PCBs have been found in caulk, EPA is committed to helping schools and communities enact plans to reduce exposure. Please contact your regional PCB coordinator at 888-835-5372 for help with assessing contamination and exposure and developing cleanup plans.

Contact

Call EPA's PCBs in Caulk Hotline: 888-835-5372 to learn more about PCBs in caulk and to get information on PCB professionals in your area.

